

The Real Super-foods: Oily Fish

Here in Scotland we have an abundant and varied natural larder of produce – in particular oily fish such as salmon, mackerel and trout. Although in days gone by oily fish was a staple part of the Scottish diet nowadays research has indicated that – in spite of being one of Europe’s primary fishing nations – we consume much less fish than other countries in Europe, such as Spain, Finland and Norway. Despite the media coverage regarding the positive health benefits of fish, the majority of us are struggling to consume the Food Standard Agency’s recommendations of two portions of fish a week, of which one portion should be oily.

So what makes oily fish so good for us? Not only is oily fish packed with protein, low in saturated fat and high in vitamins and minerals such as iron, calcium and iodine, it also contains the essential polyunsaturated fatty acid Omega-3 which can only be obtained from a very few foods. Omega-3, and in particular the bioactive components eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), have been associated with a number of health promoting qualities ranging from alleviating rheumatoid arthritis to boosting mental health.

The effects on cardiovascular health have received particular attention, with numerous studies suggesting that an increased consumption of oily fish can lower blood pressure and raise levels of “good” HDL cholesterol, while reducing “bad” LDL cholesterol. There’s increasing evidence that since oily fish makes the blood less sticky it can reduce blood clots and fatty build-ups in the arteries which can lead to cardiovascular disease, heart attacks and strokes.

Furthermore, the Omega-3 fatty acids found in oily fish may also play a role in brain health and, in particular, ensuring

mood stability. Research has found that some cultures which consume a lot of omega-3 have lower levels of mental health conditions in comparison to those who consume less. Evidence has indicated that oily fish can help improve the mood of people who are suffering from depression and has also been linked with boosting memory and improving concentration. Adequate intake of omega-3 fatty acids is not just important in adults but is essential during childhood and is particularly important in promoting healthy brain development in babies during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Oily fish not only has great effects on our heart and mental health but is also fantastic in providing numerous vitamins and minerals and is one of the best and most concentrated dietary sources of vitamin D. With the winter nights drawing in it can be difficult to get the recommended amount of vitamin D as the majority of our vitamin D is derived during the summer months when sunlight hits our skin. Including oily fish in our diet is an easy way of boosting our vitamin D. For example a portion of salmon contains roughly 360 international units (IUs), essentially a days' recommended intake for an adult! Vitamin D plays many important roles in the body including helping to maintain normal levels of calcium and phosphate and it helps aid in the absorption of calcium, something which is vital for healthy bones and teeth.

So which fish are oily? Sardines, mackerel, trout, herring, salmon, anchovies and fresh tuna all count as oily fish whether they are tinned or fresh. The only exception to this is tinned tuna, which does not count as an oily fish: when it is tinned the amount of long-chain omega fatty acids is reduced to levels similar to other white fish such as cod and haddock.

Incorporating oily fish into your diet regularly in an affordable way may seem difficult. However, getting your weekly quota of oily fish doesn't need to cost the world. Tinned oily fish, such as sardines and mackerel, are much

cheaper than fresh salmon and still contain the essential polyunsaturated fatty acids EPA and DHA. Tinned fish is a great way of stocking up your store cupboard and can be used in a variety of ways, including on toast as a quick and nutritious snack or part of a meal. As oily fish already contains a certain amount of fat, it is best to use a cooking method which doesn't require the addition of oil such as shallow frying and deep-fat frying. The best options for cooking oily fish are grilling, baking, steaming or simply added to pasta, stovies, curries and stir-fries for a no-fuss nutritious dinner option.

Authentic Mackerel Curry (Ayala Meen)

Ingredients:

- *Fish Fillets (preferably mackerel but any strong-tasting fish will do) – 500 gr*
- *2 small onions, chopped*
- *4 green chillies, slit and deseeded*
- *Ginger – thumb-sized piece, finely sliced*
- *Garlic – 5 cloves, sliced*
- *Chilli powder – $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp*
- *Turmeric powder – $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp • Grated coconut – $\frac{1}{2}$ cup*
- *Coriander leaves – 1 sprig, chopped*
- *Coriander powder – $1 \frac{1}{2}$ tsp*
- *Tamarind – small golf ball-sized (or you can use 3-4 pitted prunes)*
- *Cumin seeds – $\frac{1}{2}$ spoon*
- *Water – as required*

- Aniseed powder – $\frac{1}{4}$ tspn
- 2 fresh tomatoes, chopped/ $\frac{1}{2}$ tin whole tomatoes, roughly chopped

Method:

1. Clean the fish, remove bones and drain off excess water
2. For the marinade: in a bowl mix $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp chilli powder, $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp turmeric , $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp aniseed powder (optional) and a little water. Rub onto the fillets and leave aside for 10-15 minutes.
3. In a mixer, put the grated coconut, $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp turmeric, $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp chilli powder, tamarind/prunes, $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp cumin seeds, and a little water. Grind to a thick paste (if you don't have a blender you can simply mix by hand)
4. Heat a splash of oil in a pan and quickly fry the slit chillies, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp coriander powder, $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp chilli powder, onions, ginger and garlic
5. Add the coconut paste from step 3, briefly fry, then top up with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water to make a 'gravy'
6. Once boiling, add the marinated fish pieces, cover and simmer for 5-10 minutes. Then add tomato chunks and simmer until they are heated through
7. Garnish with coriander leaves and serve with brown rice or naan bread

Submitted by [Gail Hutchison](#)

